

Hertford Civic Society
Newsletter Planning Report – Winter 2021/2

Conversion of offices and retail

In recent years changes were made to planning legislation to enable conversion of offices and retail premises to residential use. In many cases this is a sensible reassignment because high streets are shrinking as on-line shopping increases and more people are working from home. However, there have been two applications, Expo House and Collier House both in Mead Lane, where it was proposed to convert offices forming part of a commercial/industrial operation to form apartments. The Society, along with the Town Council and others, objected because in both cases it would have resulted in sub-standard accommodation; each application has been refused.

Damage to the character of the Conservation Area

As a policy we have continued to oppose applications where in our view the proposals would be damaging to the character of the Conservation Area. Two involved building houses in existing gardens, No.17 Highfield Road was refused for a second time and No,82^A Ware Road was first withdrawn but a second revised application is awaiting decision. However, demolition and replacement of 5^A The Avenue has received approval although in our view the proposal represents a gross over-development of the site. Another proposal we thought damaging to the Conservation Area, a single storey building including a swimming pool and basement car park in the former kitchen garden of 15 West Street, received approval subject to conditions. One forbids the letting or sale as a separate building, a suggestion we had made in our submission.

Former Christ's Hospital sports ground to the west of Mangrove Road

Last Spring we submitted a supplementary comment on the application to develop the former Christ's Hospital sports ground to the west of Mangrove Road. We noted that the attenuation pond on the surface water discharge from the site could have been incorporated within the main housing area if the original number of units had not been increased by some 35%, instead of in the undeveloped area within the Green Belt. If the layout could not be changed we suggested some mitigation measures to reduce the visual impact.

Former Gates site on Gascoyne Way

The long-running saga of the redevelopment of the former Gates site on Gascoyne Way nears resolution. Two separate proposals from different applicants for retirement homes had been refused, principally on the grounds of loss of employment land. A third proposal for retaining the existing showroom and workshops for change of use coupled with the building of seven townhouses has recently received approval. However, at the behest of County Highways, the showroom cannot be converted to retail or services use owing to traffic and parking considerations so it will be limited to reuse as office accommodation, not very helpful when there is already a surfeit of such space in the town.

Town Centre Housing

Within the town centre we objected to the addition of a second storey and roof garden on No.8 Parliament Square (refused) and the redevelopment of the Kwik Fit site at No.138 Fore Street (awaiting decision). The big threat to the Green Belt came in the form of an application for outline consent to build a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Hertingfordbury Park. We objected on grounds that the applicant had not demonstrated very special circumstances allowing development in the Green Belt as required under the National Planning Policy Framework, and we endorsed the detailed objections from the Hertingfordbury residents.

Full details of the Society's submissions on recent planning applications can be found on the website.